DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 148 PS 017 658

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TITLE The CDCC's Teacher Bursaries Scheme. Report of Course/Seminar on "Topic Work in the Primary School" (Akureyri, Iceland, August 4-8, 1987).
INSTITUTION Council for Cultural Cooperation, Strasbourg (France).
REPORT NO DECS/EGT-88-8-E
PUB DATE 21 Mar 88
NOTE 32p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Educational Experience; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Foreign Countries; Guidelines; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Instructional Design; *Learning Activities; Learning Processes; *Teaching Methods; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Iceland; *Topic Units

ABSTRACT

In its description of a specific case study, this paper illustrates the use of an inservice course/seminar to help teachers develop their theoretical perspectives and demonstrate their ability to link theories to the practical teaching situation in their schools. Emphasis was placed on a course/seminar design which led teachers through a sequence involving experience, reflection, and theory--the sequence that was used to structure this report. Aims of the course were to: (1) introduce and develop an understanding of the topic approach to learning; (2) emphasize the potential of a topic as a context for developing skills in written expression; and (3) provide a model which would help teachers implement topic studies in their classes. Participants were 29 Icelandic teachers and 4 Council for Cultural Co-operation grantees. Section I provides detailed materials on the experience of learning through the topic approach. Section II describes participants, course characteristics, and a field trip. Section III focuses on the reflection phase of the course. Section IV, which concerns the theory phase of the project, compares topic web and topic line approaches. Appended are a list of participants and a 5-page guide to planning topic studies. (RH)

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The CDCC's Teacher Bursaries Scheme

European teachers' seminar on
"Topic work in the primary school"

Akureyri, Iceland, 4-8 August 1987

Report

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

The CDCC's Teacher Bursaries Scheme

Course/Seminar on
"Topic work in the primary school"
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Report
by

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I. FLOWERS ON THE ROOF, IDEAS IN OUR HEADS

Steve Bell, Staff Tutor, Inservice Division, Jordanhill College of Education

1. Introduction

1.1 Links between Theory and Practice

One of the most persistent questions for teacher educators, whether engaged in pre-service or inservice education, is how to link educational theory with classroom practice. During initial training, students in pre-service lack the classroom experience necessary to show the relevance of theories being taught. Paradoxically, this lack of experience leads to pre-service courses concentrating on theory, philosophy and subject matter leaving the development of methodology as a low priority. Students are left to make their own links between these elements and often fail to do so.

Practising teachers have different needs. They want to make the best use of the few opportunities they get to attend in-service courses and they look for ideas of relevant and practical use. Their experience makes them well aware of on-going classroom problems such as lack of motivation and they are often searching for solutions to these.

This paper, in describing a specific case study, also attempts to illustrate the use of a workshop course based on classroom practice to help teachers to illuminate and modify their theoretical perspectives and to demonstrate their ability to link theories to the practical teaching situation in their schools. The emphasis will be on a course design which leads teachers through the sequence - EXPERIENCE
REFLECTION
THEORY

1.2 The Process of Learning

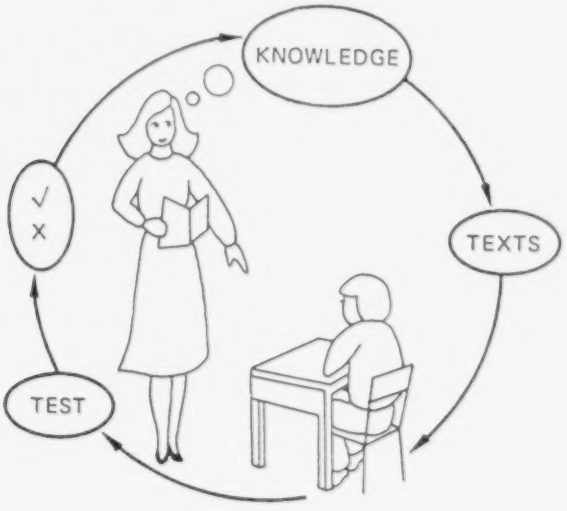
In 1912, John Dewey wrote in his book 'Interest and Effort in Education' (1), "By good teaching we here mean that provision of school experience wherein the child is whole heartedly active in acquiring the ideas and skills needed to deal with the problems of his expanding life".

Seventy-two years later, in the material inviting papers for the 8th Conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe, one paragraph reads, "It is not only necessary for a teacher to know and master his subject, he must also be capable of creating a favourable learning climate and learning conditions for his pupils by his method of instruction and his personal example. Curricula, syllabuses, aims and objectives do not automatically trigger off learning processes in the pupils. A much more important prerequisite for this to happen is the active steps taken by a teacher". (2)

Both of these statements highlight the importance of an active methodology linked to the aims of the school. These aims are based on a particular view of knowledge but "knowledge" can have very different definitions.

One is the view of knowledge as something which is possessed by the informed adult and is transmitted piece by piece by some means or other to the learner. The assessment of the success in this process is determined by the extent to which children can reproduce what is taught in the original form. Based on this view concepts are defined for children and skills are demonstrated to them and copied by them. The problem here is that they may never at any stage see the direct relevance of what they have to learn in relation to the world in which they live.

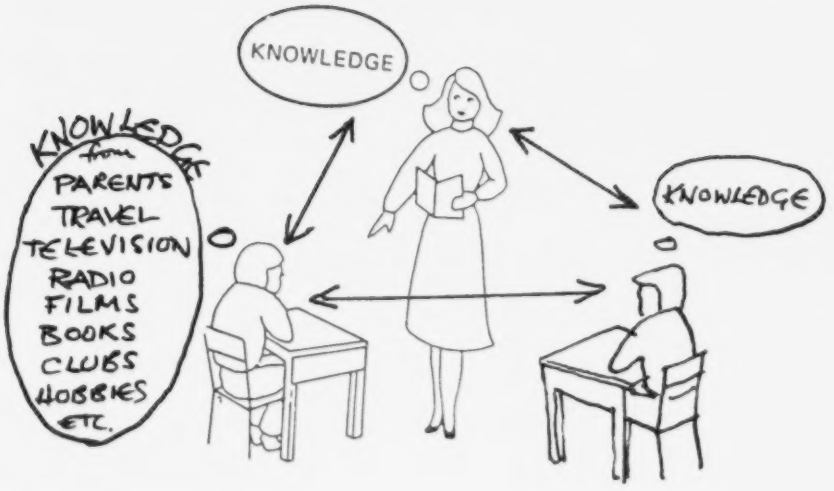
Model A



In using model A, teachers feel relatively secure. Most of the work is programmed using carefully graded text books. The emphasis is often on factual knowledge which is easy to test. The answers are either right or wrong.

Another view is of knowledge as being something which learners have to construct for themselves so that they have the opportunity to make connections with what they already know. Using this definition the learner will employ a whole range of skills - imagining, recalling, designing, 'inventing', reporting, explaining, discriminating, defining, questioning etc. The children are mentally and physically active as agents in their own learning. They should see the need to know how to do something and be placed in the position where they see the relevance of whatever aspect of a skill they have to learn in order to perform what they have to do.

Model B



Model B demands different skills from the teacher. A key major resource is what is inside the children's heads already. The main question then becomes what focus to use to help pupils to develop the skills mentioned above.

1.3 Background

This was the view of learning implied in the recommendations made in the primary memorandum published in Scotland in 1965. (3) In it, primary teachers were urged to take a holistic view of the child's education to help children relate what they learned in school to real life. Subjects were to be treated in an integrated way under the headings:

i. environmental studies,

ii. language arts, and

iii. aesthetic subjects.

It was this challenge which led twenty years ago to the setting up of a small staff tutor team in Jordanhill College of Education to be involved in helping teachers to implement the aims of the report.

Since then, working in partnership with Local Authority Education Officers, Advisers and especially Primary Teachers, the team led by Fred Rendell, a highly respected practitioner and innovator, has developed a methodology which attempts to provide sound structures to help teachers adapt to Method B.

1.4 The Topic Method

Rendell, in his publication 'Topic Study: How and Why?' (4), describes the approach as a means of addressing those fundamental questions about how children learn, what children learn and setting these in a practical strategy for teachers which provides a model of pedagogy and classroom management within which professional development can take place.

As already mentioned, it also takes a view of the structure of knowledge which is more concerned with the psychology of the learner than the epistomology of subjects.

In describing the strategy used in The Topic Approach, Rendell lists a model of procedure which will have the following features:

a. It should start from the notion that the world around us is complex and many layered and that children have some notions of their own already as to how it works.

b. It should have a story-line sequence which children can follow:

   1. Set the scene in place and time;
   2. Introduce people and/or animals;
   3. "Figure out" the way of life;
   4. Cause incidents to occur which have to be dealt with.

c. It should employ the general strategy of enquiry which is naturally carried out by human beings; problem-tackling.

d. It should exemplify ways of dealing with the problem of "right" answer by incorporating what children know already, or can suggest as possible outcomes.

e. It should demonstrate that the children's ideas are negotiable if they can support them with argument; that such skill is transferable across many situations.

f. It should provide opportunities for children to work as participant agents in their own learning within the group, or as an individual. They should be caused to bring what they know, or can imagine, to the tasks in hand.

g. It should present the need for referential skills as a natural outcome of making children think for themselves since such thinking has to be evaluated.

Rendell goes on to acknowledge that these criteria may seem ambitious. However, if they can be achieved they provide "a powerful instrument for learning to make coherent sense of the world around us and of our place within it".

The workshop courses are intent on satisfying these principles and thus providing participants with a first-hand experience of the potential for effective learning which can result. When transferred from the in-service course to the classroom, the approach should create a context for learning with the active involvement of the child; provide tasks which arise from that context and which are seen as significant and meaningful within it, giving opportunities to develop understanding and knowledge of the world within a contextual frame. That contextual frame is a Topic Study.

Flowing from this rationale, the workshops have a number of distinctive features:

1. The courses are not prefaced with "theory".

2. They engage the participants in activities similar to those they might use with children in schools.

3. These activities grow out of a narrative, the story-line, which provides the necessary structure.

4. The courses are to be thought of as games.

5. There are frequent opportunities to reflect on the course activities. The substance of these reflections is based on participants' experiences; not a pre-determined agenda of "important" issues set out by the course tutor.

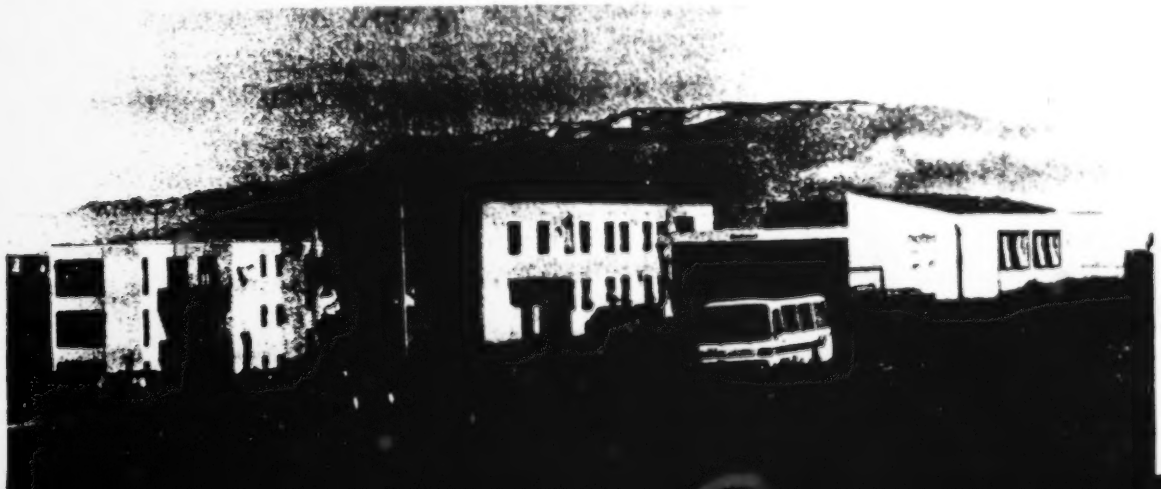
6. There is an absolute respect for the autonomy of the participants in terms of decision-making, intentions, ideas.

These are the principles within which the 1987 course in Akureyri, Iceland have to be considered.

2. Links between Jordanhill College and Kennarahaskoli Island (the Teachers' University in Iceland)

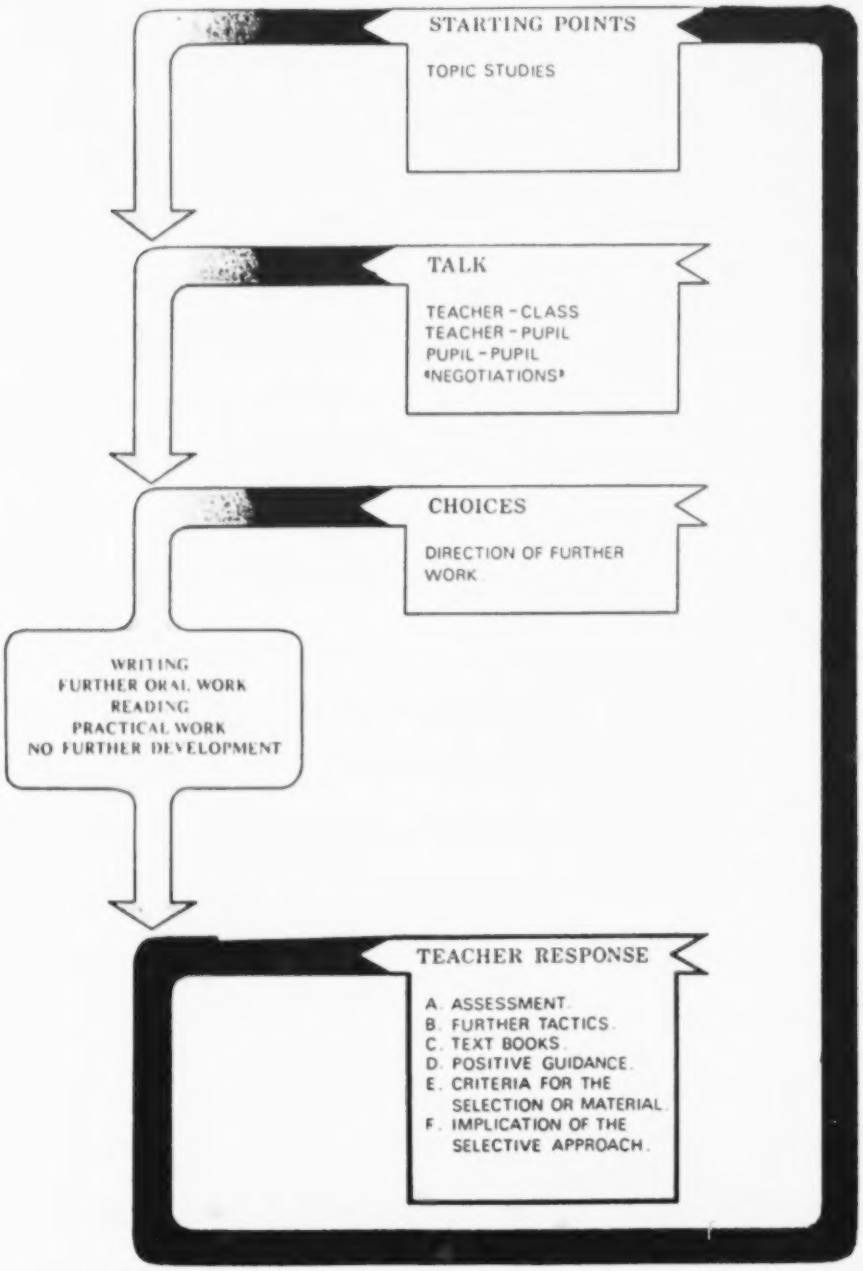
The first links were formed as early as 1979, when the Director of Inservice Teacher Training for Iceland, Rosa Bjork Thorbjarnardottir, attended a conference at Jordanhill College where she came into contact with the staff tutor team and the Topic Approach. This led to an invitation to run the workshop in Reykjavik in August 1981. With the support from the British Council, more courses followed in June 1983 and August 1985. Reciprocal visits were made, in the intervening years, by Gudmundur Kristmundsson, at that time Director of Mother Tongue Teaching for the Ministry of Education and now acting Head Teacher of the Experimental School attached to the University. All of this was made possible because of the enthusiastic support of Jonas Palsson, Principal of Kennarahaskoli Island. Many other names could be mentioned because this sequence of visits has created warm friendships with many Icelandic educationists.

The 1987 course was held in Akurevri, a major fishing harbour in the north of Iceland. The school/hotel Thelamerk provided comfortable living accommodation and excellent classroom facilities. The course was organised by Rosa Bjork Thorbjarnardottir, directed by Gudmundur Kristmundsson and the visiting tutors from Jordanhill College were Sallie Harkness and Steve Bell.



2.1 Previous Course Experience

Over the past few years, Gudmundur, Harkness and Bell have been collaborating on a small research programme concentrating on the use of Topic work to develop children's writing. Follow-up visits after the courses of 1983 and 1985 seemed to suggest that teachers using the structures being promoted on the courses were attaining better results in written language with their pupils. Gudmundur was convinced that this was because of the support provided by the context which gave the work relevance and purpose. The framework used on these previous courses was this one taken from "Language Arts in the Primary School" published by Renfrew Division of Strathclyde Region in 1982. (5)



Once again the emphasis was to be on Language Development within the topic study.

2.2 Choice of Topic

On previous visits to Iceland, the staff tutors had selected environmental topics from their own library which they thought were relevant to the primary teachers on the island, Airport, the Lorry Business, Hospital, Travel Agency and Shops. For this visit, there was a special request that the storyline should be based on an Icelandic book.

In a recent publication 'Some Aspects of Thematic Work in Primary Schools' (6), emphasis is placed on the need for criteria to be identified to help in the selection of suitable topics for primary school pupils. The authors group the criteria into three categories

i. those dealing with what children bring to their learning;

ii. those dealing with the active involvement of children in the learning process;

iii. those dealing with the progression of learning.

Under criteria dealing with what the children bring to their learning, they present three questions.

i. Does the theme respect, seriously accept and build on the real world of the child?

ii. Where the theme lies outside the immediate experience of the child can sustained first-hand experience be provided OR can a detailed, purposeful and preferably physical context for learning be built up within the school?

iii. Is the focus of the theme appropriate to the child?

Under criteria dealing with the active involvement of children in the learning process:

1. Will the process of enquiry and/or the process of collaborative story-making play a central part in the child's learning experience?

2. Does the theme demonstrate maximum use of the local environment as a focus for learning?

3. Will the theme pose questions and place children in situations where they will be encouraged to formulate their own questions; to test theories; to arrive at solutions?

4. Does the theme interest the teacher to a degree of readiness to actively research and also learn with the children?

5. Does the theme allow children to participate meaningfully in the planning?

Under the criteria dealing with the progression of learning:

1. Does the theme provide opportunities for the development and application of skills?

2. Does the theme avoid duplication of previous work the class has done?

3. Does the theme extend and challenge all children?

With questions like these in mind and also taking into account the wide range taught by the course participants, a book was selected.

2.3 Aim of the course

The stated aims of the course were to:

i. introduce and develop an understanding of the Topic Approach;

ii. give special emphasis to the potential of a topic as a context for developing skills in written expression;

iii. provide a model which would help teachers to undertake their own topic studies in the future.

2.4 The Book

The book chosen was the typically Icelandic "Flowers on the Roof" by Ingibjorg Sigurdardottir, illustrated by Brian Pilkington and published by Mal og Menning. (7)

This book was available in both Icelandic and English versions which was a great advantage.

Synopsis of Story

Granny Gunn lives in the country in a little cottage with flowers on its roof. She is self-sufficient with her hens, sheep, cow and vegetable garden. Unfortunately she falls ill. Before the doctor can examine her, he has to feed the hen, milk the cow and look after the sheep. He persuades the old lady that she is getting too old to be living on her own so far from help and that she should move to a flat in the city. This she does and the rest of the story is about how she attempts to bring the atmosphere of the countryside into a top flat of a town apartment block. She is helped in this by a young boy, her new neighbour. She fills her room with plants so that it becomes a kind of jungle. She grows vegetables on her veranda and even introduces her hens into the square bedroom. The climax of the story comes when she decided to have flowers on the roof and sets about laying turf on the corrugated metal. As the story ends, we are left with the feeling that Granny Gunn will continue to adapt her flat. Perhaps there will be space for her cow.

On the surface this story is a comparison between living in the country (and being self-sufficient) and living in the town (and having to depend on other people). It also provides opportunities for the study of typical features of the Icelandic landscape but the underlying themes are universal and just as absorbing - friendship, caring, loneliness, old and young, the nature of work, hobbies, house styles etc.

2.5 The Topic Plan

Having selected the book, the tutors went on to plan an outline based on the model previously mentioned;

i. Set the scene in place and time;
ii. Introduce people and/or animals;
iii. "Figure out" the way of life;
iv. Cause incidents to occur which have to be dealt with.

Two headings are used for this topic plan - the storyline provides the connecting thread that gives sequence to the topic and the activities are the variety of behaviours which children practice during the development of the topic.

It is important to note that this prepared outline will be a short-hand reminder for the teachers of activities which they will experience on the course. It is also the "script" for the tutors.

Storyline	Activities
1. INTRODUCTION	a. Make a life size figure of Granny Gunn.
A very different Granny	b. Build a frieze which shows her cottage with the flowers on the roof.
	c. Add the animals, vegetables, etc.
	d. Using the completed visual, write a sense poem: - I see ..... - I hear ..... - I smell .... - I taste .... - I touch .... - I feel .....
	e. Write a physical description of Granny Gunn.
2. GRANNY TAKES ILL	a. Discuss what her normal routine would be, list the jobs to be done.
	b. What are the arguments for and against staying in the country?
	c. Discuss in groups what you think Granny will miss most if she moves into town (on the advice of her doctor).

3.	THE REMOVAL	a. "What would she do with the animals" Discuss this problem and suggest solutions.
		b. Read the rest of the page. Discuss the kinds of emotions she would feel on leaving the cottage. Use "Thinking bubbles".
		c. She is moving to a top flat in a new building in Reykjavik. What differences will she notice compared with her cottage: speculate and list.
4.	THE NEW FLAT	a. Compare your reactions with Granny's.
5.	THE BALCONY	a. Make a box model to play the "balcony game".
		b. Plant some seeds, pips and bulbs and see how long it will take for Granny to grow her plants. Record your findings.
		c. List the differences between "the town" and "the country". What do you think Granny would like to do in town?
6.	THE SAXOPHONE	a. How would you cheer Granny up?
		b. Read the rest of the story.
7.	THE HENS	a. What will be the neighbours' reaction to the hens in Granny's flat? Dialogue between neighbours.
		b. Make a figure to represent Granny's young friend and give him a name.
		c. Discuss whether you think his suggestion was a good one.
8.	A NEW IDEA	a. How can she make a vegetable garden - predict.
9.	THE VEGETABLE GARDEN	a. List the jobs which have to be done to make the vegetables grow.
		b. What are your favourite vegetables? How would you recognise them when they are growing? Make a visual to illustrate this information.

10.	ANOTHER NEW IDEA	a. Granny Gunn has made her flat look more and more like her cottage. Is there anything else to be done?
		b. Read the rest of the page and compare with predictions.
11.	A REAL JUNGLE	a. Use cut paper or real plants. Make a corner of the classroom into Granny's flat, or make a painting or drawing showing what it looks like.
		b. Role play being a visitor to Granny's flat.
12.	A HAPPY GRANNY	a. Describe Granny's lifestyle. Compare it with her life in the country.

2.6 Elements in Planning the Course Timetable

The next stage of the planning was for the tutors to organise a series of activities from the above outline into the time available on the course.

A typical Staff Tutor course usually has three main elements in its design -

1. practice - a practical workshop where teachers perform tasks like the children but at their own adult level, the tutors acting as the teacher.

2. reflection - this follows the practice when participants are encouraged to analyse and list the behaviours in which they have been engaged - discussing, predicting, debating, problem solving, assessing, etc.

3. new theories - an examination of the methodology and how it relates to other ways of working including planning other topics using the same approach.

On a five day course such as this one, the tutors decided to use the first three to develop the chosen topic, the final half-day of that section being used to take the group on an outing into the country to visit an old farmhouse museum similar to Granny Gunn's cottage.

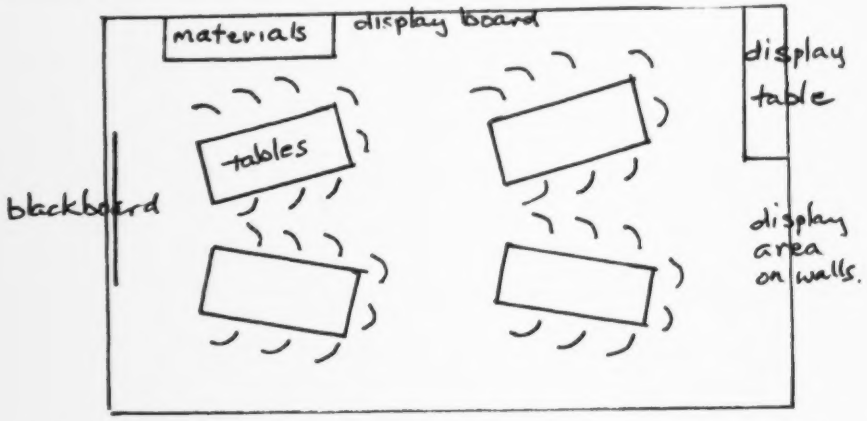
It was decided by the tutors that the fourth day, the Friday, was to be the day for "reflection" and the last day, Saturday, for discussing "theoretical implications".

A list of basic materials necessary for the course was sent in advance to the course director and all the equipment was provided as requested.

List of materials

scissors
coloured felt pens
PVA adhesive - central source with spreaders on each table
selection of sheets of coloured sugar (or pastel) paper - size A2
selection of tissue paper in a variety of colours
a collection of scrap boxes and empty grocers' cartons
art straws
selection of fabric scraps and wool
blu-tak or drawing - to attach work to display boards

Suggested layout for workshop



From their bank of resource material, the tutors selected teaching notes for use at the end of the course. (See Appendix II). These, together with the Topic Outline were sent to Gudmundur well in advance of the visit and were duplicated and collated in Iceland ready for the start of the course.

II. THE COURSE

1. Membership

The majority of the 29 Icelandic teachers on the course were resident but a few lived locally. Four participants from other countries received travel bursaries from the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation's Teacher Bursaries Scheme. They were Martin Coolen, a school principal from Belgium, Jos Letschert a Curriculum Development Officer from the Netherlands, Wilhelm Wolf from the Ministry of Education in Austria and Lucy Sinclair from Loughborough University in the United Kingdom (England).

2. The Practice

After a short introduction by Gudmundur, the first excerpt of the story was read to the teachers, in English and then in Icelandic. A discussion followed in order to elicit the details contained in this section of the story.

- What did Granny Gunn look like?
- Can we imagine the appearance of the surrounding countryside?
- What vegetables did she grow in her garden?
- What other foods would she be able to produce for herself?

.....

.....

This discussion led naturally to several group activities:

Group 1 made a lifesize visual of Granny Gunn;

Group 2 built a frieze showing the landscape in which Granny Gunn's cottage was situated;

Group 3 made the cottage and the vegetable garden;

Group 4 made a visual showing all the ways in which Granny Gunn could be self-sufficient.

When completed the visuals were displayed and discussed. It was recognised that these provided a very powerful stimulus for language development especially since the members of the class were being asked to talk and write about something thich THEY THEMSELVES HAD MADE. As an example of this, physical descriptions were written of Granny Gunn and a structure considered for a written description of her cottage in its setting.

Now that the scene was set, it was much easier for the participants to become involved in imaginative writing within the context. They were put in the position of standing beside the cottage to describe the scene using the structure for a sense poem as in the Topic Outline.

These poems were composed in Icelandic and read back during a session chaired by Gudmundur.

Using this form of activity-based development, the tutors worked through the planned topic outline. A casual observer of this approach may think that it is very restricted because the story is pre-determined and leads children towards convergent or "right" answers. The paradox of the Topic Approach is that the structure provided by the storyline creates freedom and open-endedness. The participants on the course think that this is <u>their</u> story.

THEY made Granny Gunn.

THEY built her cottage and decided its situation.

THEY plan[illegible] her daily programme.

THEY ...

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS FEELING OF INVOLVEMENT CANNOT BE OVER-EMPHASISED.

Each excerpt from the story was read to the group as the succession of practical activities was developed, sometimes designed by the teacher and at other times suggested by the participants. On this course, these included making pictures and friezes, building models, acting out incidents in drama and movement, gathering information and re-ordering it in the form of charts, diagrams and graphs and using reference sources.

The tutors concentrated on the wide range of possibilities for language and especially the move from oral to written language. Even in the short time available on the course, teachers were involved in discussing, comparing, contrasting, debating, reporting, explaining, listening.

Writing tasks included:

- narrative;
- dialogues;
- physical descriptions;
- simple biographies;
- poems;
- a daily programme;
- a diary;
- instructions;
- letters and postcards.

The CONTEXT of the story gives meaning to the practice of these skills. The participants could see the RELEVANCE and PURPOSE in these activities.

When the topic study had been fully explored Topic Outlines were distributed. Teachers seemed surprised to discover that the course had been so carefully sequenced and were delighted to receive this tangible reminder of their practical experiences.

At this stage the teachers have

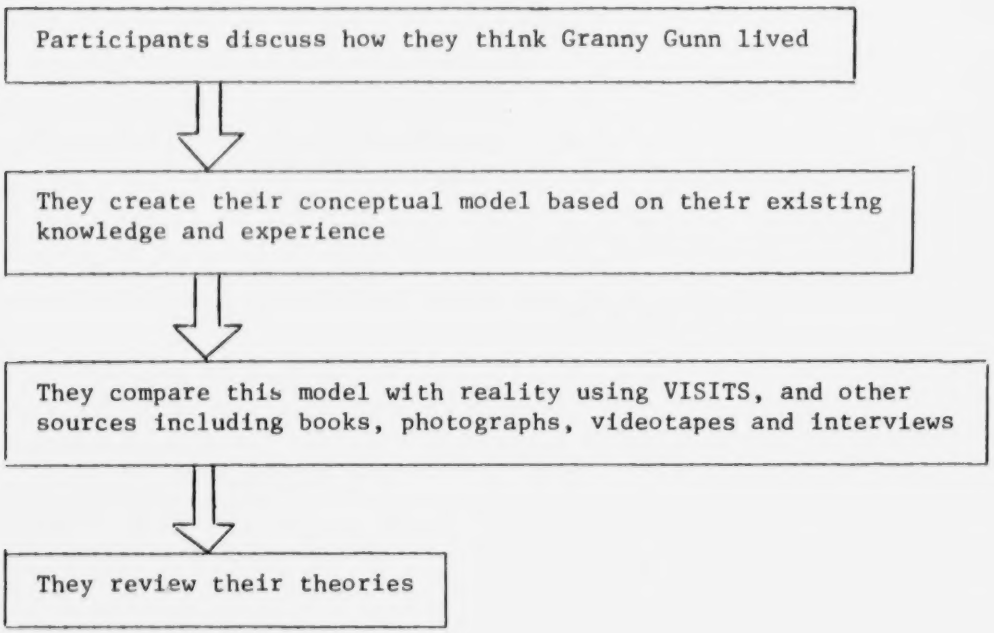
- heard the story;
- been engaged in the activities and made their own notes.
- been given the Topic Outline.

They feel secure, and are ready to take this topic back to their classroom or school.

3. The visit

An important element in many topic studies is the visit. Traditionally, it was common for teachers to start a project with a visit. The assumption being that the children would become informed as early as possible about the subject for the study. The Jordanhill staff tutor approach suggests that more is gained educationally if the visit is left until the latter part of the study so that pupils have been given the opportunity to raise the questions and to hypothesise about the answers before they compare these with the real thing.

The model therefore looks like this:


Participants discuss how they think Granny Gunn lived
They create their conceptual model based on their existing knowledge and experience
They compare this model with reality using VISITS, and other sources including books, photographs, videotapes and interviews
They review their theories

It was most useful on this course to be able to visit an old farm settlement in the area. It was very much larger than Granny Gunn's cottage but many things were similar including the flowers on the roof and the equipment used to make her butter and cheese and to perform her household chores. There was a high degree of interest in this visit substantiating the view that topics give purpose and point to such activities.

III. REFLECTION

The next day of the course was spent examining the experiences of the previous three.

There were several strands to this reflection. The first was the curricular one - a focus on language in the primary classroom. Teachers were asked to list the language related activities in which they had been engaged and these were arranged under the headings LISTENING, TALKING, READING, WRITING to be compared with the paper relating to the work of Professor M A K Halliday (8). This led naturally to the paper on the FUNCTIONS of language. Halliday describes seven different uses for language and urges that ALL of these should be practised. He says that language is used to:

1. get things done
   (INSTRUMENTAL)

2. regulate the behaviour of others
   (REGULATORY)

3. communicate with one's peers
   (INTERACTIONAL)

4. describe feelings
(PERSONAL)

5. explore and find out
(HEURISTIC)

6. express thoughts and imaginings
(IMAGINATIVE)

7. describe the world outside
(REPRESENTATIONAL)

This checklist could now be used in relation to the activities experienced on the course.

There followed a discussion of teaching strategies or structures - patterns for the writing of poems, the nature of a simple biography and a physical description, helping pupils to plan a sequence for narrative writing etc. There was a recognition by the course participants that this kind of framework is required if children are to produce work of quality in the classroom and to feel confident that they are meeting the demands being placed on them. It was also noted that the tutors had been demonstrating this by example.

Another issue related to differentiation. The tutors, in preparing the course had no way of knowing what ranges of ability would be represented in pupils taught by the course members. There followed a discussion of how this story could be adapted for younger or older pupils.

The assessment of the language work of pupils in the primary classroom has always been seen as a "problem area" for the teacher. The Jordanhill staff tutor team agrees with the authors of the Language Arts Guidelines previously mentioned (5) when they state:

> "Of the various purposes of assessment, we are here concerned with the means whereby we direct the pupil's attention to the ways in which his language can be developed and improved upon - essentially, that is with formative assessment. From this definition, it follows that no assessment should be practised which does not have a clearly defined and limited purpose.
>
> We have already explored the importance of purpose in our argument and have identified a considerable range of these together with the ways in which language functions vary accordingly. This would imply, therefore, that for each purpose there should be an appropriate technique of assessment. It would also imply that there is no technique which alone suits the whole range of language uses employed by the children. WE ADVOCATE, THEREFORE, A VIEW OF ASSESSMENT WHICH HAS THE GENERAL AIM OF DEVELOPING THE CHILD'S COMPETENCE IN ALL FORMS OF LANGUAGE. WE REJECT THE VIEW WHICH SEES ASSESSMENT AS THE TESTING OF A SUPPOSEDLY FINISHED PRODUCT. In practice, we should look for the appropriateness of the child's use of language in relation to CONTEXT, AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE".

1. Evaluation

Encouragement for the pupil and respect for the work produced were two aspects apparent on the course. During the discussion at the 'reflection' stage, much emphasis was laid on the importance of quality and care when the work is displayed. How a teacher deals with the pupil's work is just as important to the child as what he says about it. This creates a partnership and an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom. Care was taken in organising the course that a wide range of attractive materials were available not only for art and craft activities but also to frame and display written work, produced by the participants.

IV. THE THEORY

1. Reactions of Icelandic Course Members

The course members were encouraged to examine their behaviour over the three days of the workship. Their experience had been to respond as class pupils with the tutors acting as teachers, an experience which many found novel and illuminating. They found it was not always easy to work in a group or to be asked to expose their own weaknesses in an individual task. They considered reactions to the work they had produced - many were surprised and delighted with the end products. As a class the participants were marvellous to work with, hard working, enthusiastic and dynamic in their response to the ideas presented.

2. Council of Europe participants

A highlight of the course was a presentation made by each of the four foreign participants who, in turn, explained what the experience meant to them. Starting as they were from different education systems, it was fascinating for the course members to learn of their many and varied reactions.

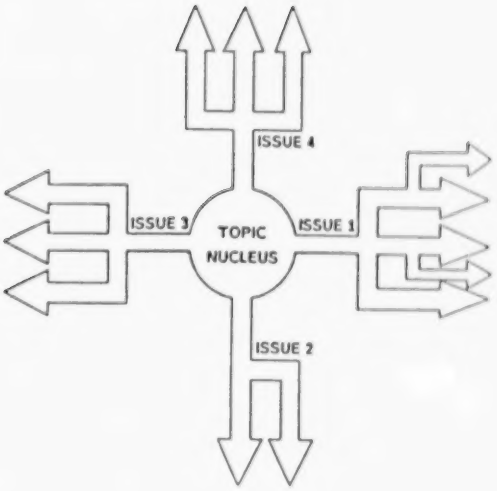
Comparisons of other topics have been found by the tutors to be of great value in exposing the underlying principles and aiding transfer and on this occasion a video film was shown of the topic "Space Abduction". This film was made by a Danish film company for the Educational Products Department of LEGO (9) and shows topic work over one term with ten to twelve year old children in a small school in the Borders Region of Scotland. It explains the Topic Approach and how children engage in a wide range of related activity.

3. Topic Studies in Europe - the International Scene

Over the past ten years the Staff Tutors have increasingly been invited abroad to work with teachers and have visited Belgium, Switzerland, Bahrain, Hong Kong, Gibraltar, Denmark and the Federal Republic of Germany as well as Iceland.

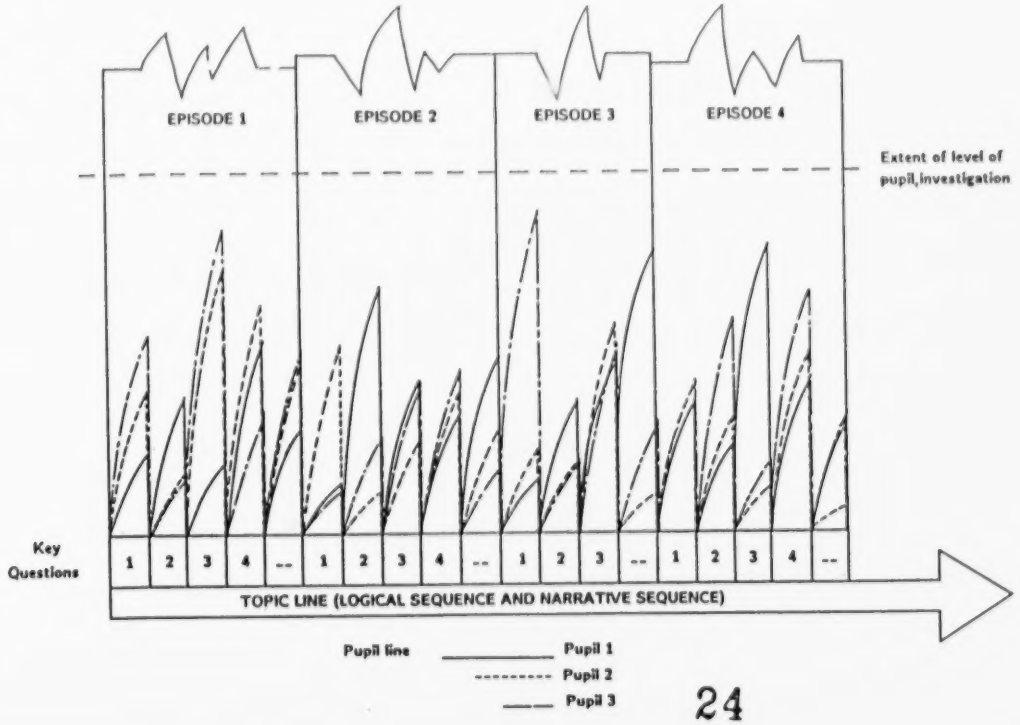
In September 1986, Ian M. Barr, the Evaluation Officer from the Scottish Curriculum Development Centre, accompanied one of the tutors on a course given in Ahrensbur, Schleswig-Holstein. Barr, in his evaluation report, (10) examines the methodology in some detail presenting his findings in the form of these diagrams. "Die Methode Glasgow" is the name given to the topic method in Germany. This term is taken from an article by Dr. Ulf Schwanke in a chapter he wrote in Deutschunterricht 5-10 published in 1980. (11)

Diagram 1



Superficially it might seem that Die Methode Glasgow's approach to topic based work is essentially the same as the better known Topic Web approach. This is not the case. There is a basic and important difference between the two. Topic Webs have at their centre the main topic or issue (see diagram 1) and from that central topic a number of aspects are studied. It is not important in this approach when any particular aspect is dealt with. When one aspect of the topic has been exhausted the learner returns to the central nucleus and embarks on the investigation of another aspect. This is not the case with Die Methode Glasgow where, althought the topic might well be the same, the sequence of investigations is all important. The story line, or unfolding narrative, provides not only a structure but a logic to the developing topic based work (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2


EPISODE 1
EPISODE 2
EPISODE 3
EPISODE 4
Extent of level of pupil investigation
Key Questions
1 2 3 4 -- 1 2 3 4 -- 1 2 3 -- 1 2 3 4 --
TOPIC LINE (LOGICAL SEQUENCE AND NARRATIVE SEQUENCE)
Pupil line
Pupil 1
Pupil 2
Pupil 3

1. The topic line is a logical progression and a narrative sequence.

2. The topic writer sets out a number of key questions within each episode which all pupils must address.

3. Each key question relates to the particular episode of the narrative.

4. Each episode has infinite potential in terms of possible development and investigation. The extent of the investigation will be dependent on the motivation and personal experience of each child. There is therefore an optimum level at which each episode and key question can be investigated by each pupil.

5. For formative assessment purposes, the teacher should determine whether or not each pupil is stretching sufficiently towards the cut-off level in terms of conceptual and skill development.

6. Each pupil will reach different levels within each key question and will retun to the base story line for the next question.

7. There is no preferred pupil track, ie. it is not necessarily the case that increasingly higher levels of involvement will occur as the topic progresses.

8. The latent abilities of each pupil will to some extent determine the level to which each question is investigated, depending on the activities selected.

V. CONCLUSION

The course in Akureyri gained much from the quality and enthusiasm of the course members. From the first day, they participated actively in the production of the visuals which created the context for the variety of work which followed. Always there and leading by example was Gudmundur Kristmundsson, the course Director - introducing and explaining new activities, translating for the tutors or organisisng resources. The fact that the course was run in English, even Scottish English, did not seem to present problems, yet another reason to congratulate the teachers and advisers on the course.

The presence of the four Council of Europe participants added another dimension to the discussions which came towards the end of the week and this was greatly appreciated by the Icelandic participants.

The response from the course members during the final seminar seemed to suggest that they had enjoyed their experience, would be able to put many of the ideas into practice and would attempt to transfer the approach to other topics. The Icelandic teachers also decided that they should

i. exchange storylines and themes developed by themselves;

ii. circulate ideas and materials via teachers' centres;

iii. organise a follow-up meeting to exchange experiences.

The tutors endorsed these very encouraging suggestions and hoped that through the variety of experiences gained on the course the teachers would be better able to analyse their school and classroom practice and link these with new theoretical perspectives.

This course may have started with FLOWERS ON THE ROOF but it is to be hoped

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A P P E N D I X I

Notes given to the teachers on the Akureyri Course

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE FOR THE TOPIC PLANNING

: TOPIC OUTLINE _____

Storyline	Activities
1. PLACE (Where?)	a. Children list things needed to turn space into _____ (wordbank of names)
	b. Class build up a 3D model or a 2D frieze.
	c. Discussion of location of facilities etc. leading to agreed changes if necessary.
	d. Simple description (Wordbank)
2. PEOPLE (Who?)	a. Children suggest people who would be involved, Make figures (collage, drawing, etc.)
	b. Simple biographies, job descriptions and descriptions of appearance are complied (Oral/written).
3. INCIDENTS (What happens?)	a. Children suggest different possibilities and then explore ideas through discussion and activities (Art, craft, drama, etc.)
	b. Picture stories and simple narrative recounting the incidents are made up by groups and/or individuals.
4. RULES (Why?)	a. Children discuss need for rules - build up a list of suggestions.
	b. "Rules" are agreed and published (Pictures, symbols, writing).
5. RHYTHMS (When?)	a. Define busy and quiet times giving reasons etc. eg Patterns-seasonal, weekly, daily etc.
	b. Develop ideas through discussion, practical activities and record in various ways (Visual work, tape recording, written work).
6. SPECIAL EVENT	a. Teacher/pupils suggest a particular incident which will bring the topic to a satisfying climax/conclusion. eg a part, opening ceremony, visit of important person.
	b. After discussion groups tackle practical activities which provide opportunities to move on to more talk or written work.

(SCH - Inservice Education)

PLANNING A UNIT OF WORK FOR A TOPIC STUDY

		STORY POEM OBJECT VISIT		KEY QUESTIONS
1.	STIMULUS or INPUT MATERIAL	SONG/MUSIC BOOK FILM QUESTION	DISCUSSION	NEW VOCABULARY

2. ACTIVITIES: (as a consequence of the discussion GROUPS (size ? Composition?)
making pictures, models, friezes etc.
mime, movement and dance
role playing and dramatisation
listening to and making music
measuring, estimating and counting
devising and carrying out "science" experiments
looking at books, posters, slides, films, television
making tape recordings
reading aloud and choral speaking
listening to tapes
visits to places outside the school
visits of ('experts') to the school INTERVIEWS

3.	REPORTING BACK	explaining describing questioning criticising justifying evaluating appreciating	DISCUSSION	KEY QUESTIONS NEW VOCABULARY

4. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT: Individual, group, class?

1. Will children need help in STRUCTURING what they want to say? If so WHICH STRUCTURE?
2. Which vocabularly should be displayed in the WORDBANK?
3. What KIND of writing is most appropriate?
4. Will children need to be reminded of conventions in PUNCTUATION BEFORE starting their first draft?

(SCH - Inservice Division)

WRITING IN A TOPIC

A topic study can provide a meaningful context in which a variety of kinds of writing may be attempted and practised. The first advantage of using the topic as a vehicle for language activities is the INTEREST which it creates. Secondly, the many practical activities provide opportunities for different kinds of talking (see Joan Tough material). When the children are thoroughly familiar with the content of what they want to say and have built up an appropriate WORDBANK, the teacher may then discuss with them which STRUCTURE is most suitable for the writing they are about to undertake. She may think fit to remind them of some simple conventions at this point, (eg how to set down a script or dialogue, layout of a biography etc.) The children are now ready to attempt their first draft.

IDEAS/THOUGHTS . . . . . TALKING . . . . . WRITING

Writing about FACTS How it works
(Construct)
Cognitive
FUNCTIONAL or TRANSACTIONAL WRITING

CLEAR, CONCISE, ACCURATE, CORRECT
SEQUENCE:
LOGICAL, ORDERED
REPORTS
INSTRUCTIONS
FORMS AND DOCUMENTS
JOB DESCRIPTIONS
EXPLANATIONS OF FUNCTION
ADVERTISEMENTS
TICKETS
POSTERS
BUSINESS LETTERS
MINUTES of meetings and class discussions
SPEECHES of welcome, thanks, debates.
HEADLINES and CAPTIONS

Writing about FEELING
(Atmosphere, How it feels)
Affective
IMAGINATIVE or PERSONAL WRITING

ORIGINALITY, INTEREST, VOCABULARY
SEQUENCE: 'good beginnings, developments and endings'.
DESCRIPTIONS
NARRATIVES
SCRIPTS
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES
BIOGRAPHIES
INTERNAL MONOLOGUES (Thinks writing)
DIARIES AND LOGS
POEMS
PRAYERS
LETTERS (personal)

The categories FUNCTIONAL and IMAGINATIVE are not mutually exclusive nor, in the early stages, clearly defined, as much of the children's writing could be classed as EXPRESSIVE (Britton's category: they write as they speak).

When the first draft has been completed, the question of ASSESSMENT or EVALUATION arises.

IS THIS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

IS THE MEANING CLEAR?

If not; WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

Choice of vocabulary?
Sequencing of ideas?
Formalities of calligraphy?
or spelling?
or grammar?

(SCH - Inservice Division)

SENSE POEM - A structure for description

Children need help in structuring their descriptions of real or imaginary situations. As we all perceive the world through the five senses, they can be used to provide a simple framework which is capable of many variations.

We should remember that the thought processes which underlie descriptions will be different.

a. If a child is recalling a real experience, he/she has to remember the details of that experience and recreate them in words. The mode of language used here is REPORTING.

b. If the child is discussing an imaginary experience or event he/she has to project himself/herself into a new situation and imagine what will happen and how he/she may feel. He/she is SPECULATING and IMAGINING. It is, or course, important to remember that this new ideas are bound to be influenced by his/her own experience of past situations.

Children's recollections and speculations can be given shape and structure if the teacher reminds them of the senses which permit them to absorb experience.

The teacher may decide to ask questions about all five senses -

What do / would you see?
hear?
smell?
taste?
feel/touch? (physical)

It is also useful to consider "feeling" in the more psychological sense of feeling happy, sad, anxious and this kind of description whether oral or written can be rounded off by a final consideration - what do you wish?

A sample starting point for each phrase or line could be -

I see ....
I hear ...
etc.

It is then possible to build up a pattern of response if the children are first asked to suggest nouns eg in the street

I see	cars
I hear	people
I smell	bread
I taste	ice cream
I feel/touch	the pavement
I feel	
I wish	

New adjectives may be added

I see fast cars
I hear noisy people
I smell fresh bread
I taste cold ice cream
I touch the hot pavement
I feel tired
I wish I was at home

If the starters are removed, a more "poetic" description results and a title may be added -

In the Street
Fast cars
Noisy people
The smell of fresh bread
The taste of cold ice cream
But the hot pavement makes me tired
I was at home

When the children have had much practice in using this form, working along with the teacher in the class or in the group they may make further additions:

In the Street
Fast cars are flying past
Noisy people shout and cry
The smell of fresh bread drifts across the street
While I enjoy the taste of cold ice cream
But ..... etc

Many variations are possible and soon the children may use the structure as a framework for individual pieces of writing. It is a structure which is suited to the description of a dramatic situation, one which is very pleasant or quite frightening or uncomfortable.

It is not necessary to include all five senses - taste and smell are often inappropriate. Sometimes it is interesting to focus attention on one sense only - cars skidding, lorries grinding, people shouting, dogs barking ..

(SCH - Inservice Division)

A P P E N D I X II / A N N E X E I I

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